



September 5, 2009

## More environmental groups oppose W.Va. coal rally

The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) - Organizers of the Friends of America rally have added a karaoke competition to the pro-coal Labor Day event, but anger among environmentalists continued to mount Friday.

Auditions for 8- to 18-year-old singers are scheduled for 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the rally site on a reclaimed surface mine near Holden. Organizers say the best 30 will advance to a second round of auditions starting at 4 p.m.

Plans call for the top three to sing Monday at an event that could draw as many as 100,000 people.

Coal producer Massey Energy and more than 100 associations and businesses are sponsoring the rally and free concert, which will feature country singers Hank Williams Jr. and John Rich, among others.

Earlier this week, the Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity blasted Verizon Wireless for its sponsorship of the event, arguing it amounts to support for mountaintop removal coal mining and opposition to legislation designed to control climate change.

Late Friday, the group said more than 80,000 people had signed on to their letter to Verizon, including groups that represent millions of members. They include the Natural Resources Defense Council, Defenders of Wildlife, Rainforest Action Network, Greenpeace USA, Friends of the Earth, Appalachian Voices and Christians Caring for Creation.

Massey Chief Executive Don Blankenship has said the rally is designed to focus attention on the need to protect American jobs by ensuring they aren't taxed or regulated out of existence. The rally Web site asks concertgoers to sign a petition against federal cap-and-trade legislation designed to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Blankenship told the Charleston Daily Mail on Friday that he does not believe in climate change and that the benefits of mining and energy production must be weighed against the environmental costs.

"You've got to either have energy or be willing to live in poverty and die young," he said.

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On the Net:

Friends of America Rally: [www.friendsofamericarally.com](http://www.friendsofamericarally.com)

Center for Biological Diversity: <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/>